

Is Hell Eternal?

Have you ever been challenged by someone who objected to the idea of eternal hell? If so, then you're not alone. And most likely you're familiar with the one-line argument that goes something like this, "well, if God is such a loving God, then why would He permit millions of people to burn in hell forever?" Few Christians have managed to dodge such objections to their traditional view of hell. Truth be told, unbelievers aren't the only ones who harbor such doubts either. In fact, even the most devout Christian has at one time or another grappled with the idea that their friends and loved ones may well spend eternity agonizing in hell.

But what if a perpetual hell is not even scriptural? What if the Bible's scheme of judgment is very different than what is commonly supposed? And maybe—just maybe—there is a slight chance that those who believe in **equitable justice** or **temporal punishment** have an equally valid interpretation of the same scriptures that seem to describe eternal torment? If so, this possibility should not be easily discounted or ignored. After all, hell is no small matter and represents one of the chief reasons why God's character is frequently under attack and why people often misjudge Him as being callous and cruel.

So here are some points to consider:

MORAL OBJECTIONS

By Jeremy K. Moritz (in blue)

Let us suppose for a moment that Hell is as the majority of Christians describe it—namely, a place of eternal torture. Hell is a place where unbelievers and sinners will be [or are currently being] tortured without end in the most unbelievably hideous way that any person could possibly imagine: unquenchable fire that inflicts pain but does not destroy. If indeed this is true, how can we avoid the fact that this is an obvious reflection on the character of God? God is the creator of all things. No one but God has the power to create. Satan did not invent this place of torment; God did. It was God's design. God isn't sitting up in Heaven with His hands tied wishing He had the power to change the system—it's His own system! Even those who try to claim that God did not create Hell still have to accept that it is fully within His power to destroy it. If God didn't create Hell, then why does He allow His most beloved creatures to be tortured in it? It must be recognized that some of the culpability for Hell rests solely on God's shoulders. So what does this say about Him?

Clark Pinnock, professor of systematic theology at McMaster Divinity College, defends the annihilation doctrine with the assertion that "this 'capital punishment' view of the final judgment at least does not involve a deity who is endlessly vindictive and a new creation where heaven and hell exist alongside each other forever.... The traditional understanding of hell is unspeakably horrible. How can one imagine for a moment that the God who gave his Son to die for sinners because of his great love for them would install a torture chamber somewhere in the new creation in order to subject those who reject him to everlasting pain?" (Clark Pinnock, "Fire, Then Nothing." Christianity Today v. 20. March, 1987.)

I cannot think of a more devastating slander that could be associated with someone's name than the one that Christians have attributed to God. Just think of the worst, cruelest, most wretched human beings in earth's history: Attila the Hun, Benito Mussolini, Genghis Khan, Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, and others. More than likely, Adolf Hitler was the first name to come to mind. But even the ruthless Hitler had not the heart to do the kind of things that are being accredited to God. Nothing that his victims experienced can even come close to the pains that must be present in the common Christian perception of Hell. What is a year's worth of hard labor compared with an eternity in burning flames? What is the murder of 16 million people when compared with billions being kept alive for no other purpose than to ceaselessly extract every ounce of pain from them for trillions upon trillions of agonizing years with no hope of ever escaping? If Hell is really as bad as this, then God has designed a system of judgment that involves far more horrendous practices than even the wickedest of men would ever dream of. What can be said about a God who would create such a place? Is this the God that we are supposed to share with others in what we call the "Good News"?

Besides, if the prospect of eternal torment is the real drive behind our desire to serve God and obey His commandments then how much do we truly love Him? And what part does this motivation play in our overall walk with Him?

Now maybe these moral objections are irrelevant because God doesn't owe any of us an explanation for why He does what He does or how He chooses to do it. Yet it may surprise you to learn that these objections *are* treated to answers in God's Word. Indeed, the Bible isn't silent about the eternal state of man, but perhaps not in the same way we may anticipate.

SHEOL

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In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word used to describe the realm of the dead is *sheol*. It simply means “the place of the dead” or the “grave.” The New Testament equivalent to *sheol* is *hades*, which is also a general reference to “the place of the dead.”

Sheol is an intermediate location for souls awaiting judgment. Under the former dispensation, it was divided in half by a great gulf. This gulf separated the righteous from the unrighteous. And while the righteous enjoyed paradise, the unrighteous existed in a state of torment (Luk 16:22-23). After Christ’s crucifixion, the righteous no longer reside in sheol’s paradise but immediately ascend to be with God in heaven (Luk 23:43; Mat 27:50-54).

GEHENNA

Gehenna is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Hinnom*, which refers to the Valley of Hinnom. According to the Bible, Hinnom was initially used as a sacred site for child sacrifice to heathen gods. It was later polluted by King Josiah and turned into a dumpsite for refuse collected from Jerusalem. To avoid contamination and disease the Jews had continual fires burning there that devoured the foul smelling garbage.

Later, Jesus would use Hinnom and its evocative imagery as analogous for the judgment to come in the afterlife.

THREE VIEWS OF HELL

By the 4th century AD there existed three predominant views of hell. The most popular at the time was universal reconciliation. This view was widely accepted by the Churches of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. **Rome espoused eternal torment** and Ephesus adhered to annihilation. Not surprising, Rome’s view would eventually win out and come to dominate all the others.

Universal Reconciliation

Those who adhere to universal reconciliation are also known as Universalists. Universalists believe that all souls are reconciled to God and admitted into heaven after serving their sentence in gehenna. The passages they rely on to support this belief are 1 Timothy 4:10 and 1 Peter 3:19–20, 4:5–6.

Eternal Torment

Eternal torment, also known as eternal damnation, is the view that most evangelicals today subscribe to. Relying on a strictly literal interpretation of the passages describing hell, it teaches that all human souls are immortal and therefore will either spend an eternity in heaven or hell.

Annihilation

Annihilation, sometimes referred to as **conditional immortality**, teaches that humans are **not inherently immortal**. God alone is immortal and gives immortality only to those who are destined to spend eternity in His presence (1 Tim 6:16). Since Christ promised that God is able to destroy both **soul** and **body** in gehenna (Mat 10:28), those sent to hell will not likely experience **eternal conscious punishment**, but rather annihilation **after a period of "temporal punishment"**.

APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY AND SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched (Mar 9:43-44).

Few Christians realize that the strong language of hell located in Mark 9 and elsewhere in the Gospels is repeated nearly verbatim in the Old Testament prophets. When Jesus lectured about the dangers of being thrown into unquenchable fire, **He was not introducing a new dimension of the underworld hitherto unfamiliar to the Jewish mind**. Rather He was appealing to a certain concept of judgment that the Jews were both familiar with and recognized from their Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, we may soon discover that the Old Testament is rife with mention of “**immortal worms**” and “**unquenchable fire**”. **Yet these words are employed in a strictly non-literal context. They depict severe judgment using apocalyptic imagery and symbolic language. Notice:**

*Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, **and the mountains shall be melted with their blood**. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall **come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment**. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, **it is made fat with***

*fatness...for the **LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea...** their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. **It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever:** from generation to generation it shall lie waste; **none shall pass through it for ever and ever.** And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls (Isa 34:1-13).*

*And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: **for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched;** and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh (Isa 66:23-24).*

*Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, **Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah,** that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.... **my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched** (Jer 7:2; 20).*

*But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; **then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched** (Jer 17:27).*

*Son of man, set thy face toward the south, and drop thy word toward the south, and prophesy against the forest of the south field; And say to the forest of the south, Hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; **Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree: the flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burned therein. And all flesh shall see that I the LORD have kindled it: it shall not be quenched** (Eze 20:46-48).*

Isaiah's judgment decree against Edom in chapter 34 is splattered throughout with apocalyptic imagery and symbolic language. While God is certainly able to "melt mountains with blood" and "fatten His sword with fat", it is far more likely that He is

depicting severe judgment in graphic terms. And when He promises to turn Edom's rivers into tar and burn its geography with "everlasting fire", yet again we must assume that He is speaking in **symbolic language**. It is also said of Edom that the birds and thistles will be the only things left to inhabit the land. Yet how could this be possible if the rivers are still flowing with tar and the terrain burning with "unquenchable" fire?? God then swears that none will ever again pass through Edom's borders "**for ever and ever**". But you see, this too should not be taken literally simply because ancient Edom, as modern day Jordan, has certainly been inhabited many times since Isaiah's ancient proclamation of judgment.

Isaiah 66 is yet another case in point. The words located in verses 23-24 match nearly perfectly with those in Mark 9:44. **But does God truly expect us to gaze at rotting corpses being consumed by "immortal worms" as we pilgrimage to worship in His holy temple?** No! Not at all. **Such language is not intended to be taken literally.** After all, the Old Testament prophets repeatedly employ apocalyptic imagery and symbolic language to describe God's judgment. What these prophecies simply mean is this: "What you have done is so terrible that it will result in severe death, destruction, and loss!"

It's important to realize that symbolic language and apocalyptic imagery is not only confined to the Old Testament. In fact, it could just as easily be demonstrated out of the New Testament also. Revelation 18-19 is a prime example. Notice how it reads:

*And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, **when they shall see the smoke of her burning**, ...saying, What city is like unto this great city! ... **And her smoke rose up for ever and ever** (Rev 18:9; 18; 19:3).*

So what are these verses saying? Is Babylon destined to burn forever and ever?? I hesitate to believe so. Yet the phrase "the smoke of her burning rose up for ever and ever" is analogous with the idea that **her destruction will be final and absolute. Babylon will never again recover from God's fiery judgment. She will be history forever!**

5 BIBLICAL FACTS THAT DISPROVE ETERNAL TORMENT

(1) The word hell is absent from the Bible.

What we find instead are *sheol* (Hebrew) and *gehenna* (Greek). These two words do not invoke the same impression of hell as promoted in “Dante’s inferno” or by other neo-pagan playwrights. In fact, the concept of eternal torment in the netherworld can be traced back to the Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates who largely promoted it.

(2) According to the Bible, only God is immortal, not man.

*... who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; **Who only hath immortality**, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen (1 Tim 6:15-16).*

If ONLY God is immortal then what does this mean for the rest of us? Good question. Perhaps man *isn't* immortal after all. Not everyone gets to live forever as commonly supposed. According to Romans 2, God gives immortality to whom He chooses. But we are further told that immortality is **only** granted to the individuals who diligently seek after it:

*To them who by patient continuance in well doing **seek** for glory and honour and **immortality, eternal life** (Rom 2:7).*

(3) Those who do not receive immortality will be consumed by fire and their souls extinguished.

According to the Bible, everyone who is unworthy of immortality will be **CONSUMED and extinguished** in God’s final judgment:

*But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: **they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away** (Psa 37:20).*

*Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: **the soul that sinneth, it shall die** (Eze 18:4).*

*For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, **shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.** And ye shall tread down the wicked; for **they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet** in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts (Mal 4:1; 3).*

*And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell** (Mat 10:28).*

*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire **that will consume the enemies of God** (Heb 10:26-27).*

(3) “Immortal worms” and “unquenchable fire” are graphic images representing complete destruction.

The Biblical meaning of “unquenchable fire” is **NOT** that it never dies, but rather that it **can’t be put out**. The same can be said for “immortal worms”. Every defiant soul will be consumed away as if devoured by eternal maggots. These pictures represent the complete and irreversible destruction of all evildoers on the Day of Judgment. God’s decree will not fail. It cannot be reversed or terminated prematurely.

(4) Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire.

According to Revelation 20:14, death and hell are destined to burn up in the lake of fire: ***And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death*** (Rev 20:14). This event is also known as the “second death”.

So if death and hell are eventually thrown into the lake of fire, as this passage promises, what becomes of eternal torment in hell??? **Many have wisely concluded that this marks the end of death and suffering for all time.**

(5) The words everlasting, forever, and eternal don’t exist in the original languages of the Bible.

The Hebrew *olam* (world) and the Greek *aion* (age) are translated into English in the following forms: everlasting, forever, forever and ever, eternal, world, age, eon, and era. But these particles of speech may or may not refer to eternity. Notice:

AION (eternal form)

*The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth forever (**aion**): and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man? (Jon 12:34)*

*Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever (**aion**). Amen (Rom 1:25).*

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end (aion). Amen (Eph 3:21).

AION (temporal form)

And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world (aion), neither in the world to come (Mat 12:32).

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world (aion)? (Mat 24:3)

And be not conformed to this world (aion): but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God (Rom 12:2).

OLAM (eternal form)

Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever (olam) and ever (olam): and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise (Neh 9:5).

He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne; yea, he doth establish them for ever (olam), and they are exalted (Job 36:7).

But the LORD shall endure for ever (olam): he hath prepared his throne for judgment (Psa 9:7).

OLAM (temporal form)

So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever (olam) to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations (Exo 30:21).

And the priest of his sons that is anointed in his stead shall offer it: it is a statute for ever (olam) unto the LORD; it shall be wholly burnt (Lev 6:22).

Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever (olam). And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise (Deut 15:17).

Clearly, the translators of the Bible relied on their best judgment when deciding how to render the English variants of *aion* and *olam*. This suggests that any diligent student of Scripture is just as capable of applying the same discretionary principles in the use of the word *aion* wherever it appears in the New Testament.

GOD'S EQUITABLE JUSTICE

If God is just, as His Word promises, then how does He define justice? According to the Bible, God's justice is **equitable**, meaning it is fair and good:

*But the LORD abides forever; He has established His throne for judgment, And He will judge the world in righteousness; **He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity*** (Psa 9:7-8).

*He is the Rock! His work is perfect, **For all His ways are just**; A God of faithfulness **and without injustice**, Righteous and upright is He* (Deut 32:4).

Surely, God will not act wickedly, And the Almighty will not pervert justice (Job 34:12).

*The strength of the King loves justice; **You have established equity**; You have executed **justice** and righteousness in Jacob* (Psa 99:4).

*... **For the LORD is a God of justice**; How blessed are all those who long for Him* (Isa 30:18).

*For I, the LORD, **love justice**...* (Isa 61:8).

Furthermore, by inspecting the Mosaic Law, we discover a detailed definition of what equitable justice looks like and how God applies it:

*...thou shalt give **life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot***

for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex 21:23-25).

So how does eternal torment square with this kind of justice? In reality, it doesn't. It is totally paradoxical to any form of justice. And that's exactly why **temporal punishment** makes the most sense.

HOW DOES ANNIHILATION WORK?

Those who believe in annihilation do not claim that God's judgment results in the instant destruction of the human soul. On the contrary, Annihilationists believe that **God allots varying degrees of conscious punishment to different individuals based on their accumulated misdeeds**. This means that none of Christ's warnings about hell are to be taken lightly. **While we deny that conscious punishment will last into time infinity, we realize that it will last for however long God deems appropriate**. Hence the following verses are just as consequential to Annihilationists as they are to those who believe in eternal torment:

*And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: **there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*** (Mat 13:50).

*And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: **it is better** for thee to enter halt into life, **than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*** (Mar 9:45-46).

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev 14:10).

*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have **their part** in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death* (Rev 21:8).

There's no denying the horrible torment that the enemies of God and those who've rejected Him will experience on the Day of Judgment. The "wailing and gnashing of teeth" is language that cannot be mistaken as anything but terrible. The same can be said about Mark 9:45. Jesus warns in no uncertain terms that men would have wished they were dismembered in this life than to experience an afterlife

burning up in the fires of hell. And in Revelation 14:10, Jesus again warns the Churches about the outcome of those who perish divorced from God. They will be “tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”. Everyone that has engaged in lawless behavior will have their allotted portion in the lake of fire “which burns with fire and brimstone”.

Finally, in respect to the degree of punishment and the length of time that every unbeliever spends in hell, only God knows those exact details. We can just imagine that it might be the difference between one individual whose sins were minimal, burning up like a twig, as opposed to another, whose sins were more egregious, burning up at the rate of a 50 ton redwood. Whatever the outcome, we can be confident in God’s perfect justice:

*And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, **shall be beaten with many stripes.** But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few stripes.** For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luk 12:47-48).*

*Verily I say unto you, **It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment,** than for that city. But I say unto you, It shall be **more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment,** than for you (Mat 10:15; 11:22).*

THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; **And in hell** he lift up his eyes, **being in torments,** and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; **for I am tormented in this flame.** But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: **but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.** And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from*

hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence (Luk 16:19-26).

Those who choose to take this parable literally should also consider the following questions:

1. Does the word hell found here appear in the original Greek or does it appear instead as *hades*, which simply means **the abode of the dead**?
2. Are the righteous able to view the agonies of “hell” from their location in paradise and communicate with the unrighteous as in this parable? Or is this a metaphorical picture with **implied meaning**?
3. Does Jesus refer here to the **eternal state** of man or rather his **intermediate condition** while awaiting the dreadful Day of Judgment? In other words, does this parable even apply to eternity?
4. And in comparison with *hades* or *sheol*, can those who are thrown into the lake of fire experience conscious torment for a temporary time period without having to be tormented forever and ever? Or does this parable suggest otherwise?

By pondering these questions, I hope we realize just how easy it is to make rash and hasty assumptions about some allegory in Scripture without truly appreciating its underlying meaning. Also, both Annihilationists and Traditionalists agree with the fact that this parable clearly refers to *hades*, **the transitory abode of the dead**. In fact, the few places in which the New Testament mentions *hades*, it does so **without ever suggesting that the circumstances there are eternal**. So whichever way we choose to look at it, *hades* is perhaps a poor indication of man’s eternal state.

Notice:

*For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **tartaros**, and delivered them into chains of darkness, **to be reserved unto judgment** (2 Pe 2:4).*

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he **went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water** (1 Pet 3:18-20).*

REVELATION 14:10-11

*The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; **and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever (AION): and they have no rest day nor night,** who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name (Rev 14:10-11).*

According to these verses, those “who worship the beast and his image” will be tormented **"in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb."** If nothing else, this should be an obvious indication that the penalty described here is not eternal torment. Because observing such a punishment is not the way the angels or the Lamb (Jesus Christ) will choose to spend eternity.

But the final “nail in the coffin” of eternal torment is the corresponding language between Revelation 14:10-11 and Isaiah 34:10. It is amazing how closely the two match! Notice:

*...It shall **not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever:** from generation to generation **it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever** (Isa 34:10).*

*...and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: **And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever:** and **they have no rest day nor night,** who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name (Rev 14:10-11).*

Suffice it to say, both Isaiah 34 and Revelation 14 clearly demonstrate the graphic and symbolic nature of prophecy. Seeing this is so, we should be cautious not to automatically accept these verses at face value.

ANY SECOND CHANCES AFTER DEATH?

According to Universalists, death does not eternally separate people from God even if they have died in their sins. They also believe that after a period of suffering all men will be eventually reconciled back to God. These claims are based on the following scriptures:

*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he **went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water** (1 Pet 3:18-20).*

*Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For for this cause was **the gospel preached also to them that are dead**, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, **but live according to God in the spirit** (1 Pet 4:5-6).*

First, it is important to recognize that these verses expressly refer to Christ's work on the cross and the Gospel of salvation going forth to all men, including those who have perished without knowledge of the truth prior to the New Testament dispensation. Furthermore, it is clear that after Christ's death He descended into *sheol* in order to liberate the unbelieving captives by proclaiming the Gospel to them. Those who believed and trusted in Him were saved and then able to "**live according to God in the spirit**".

Second, we can be confident based on the overwhelming testimony of Scripture that all who reject the Good News, die in unbelief, or abandon their faith in Christ, are destined to be eternally cut off, consumed, and extinguished, if they do so in the New Testament era. There are no second chances after Christ's work has been accomplished on their behalf. In other words, eternal life is no longer offered to those who have rejected the message of salvation in this present era:

*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, **that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life***

***is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life** (1 Jn 5:10-12).*

IF WE CAN'T TAKE THE BIBLE LITTERALLY OR AT FACE VALUE THEN HOW CAN WE TRUST IT?

This is one of the faultiest objections to the biblical doctrine of annihilation that can ever be raised. No one will dispute the fact that the Bible is a book full of mysteries. Those who are diligent and study it thoroughly (with the mind of the Spirit) are able to decipher it. While those who don't will become easily confused (2 Tim 2:15; 2 Pet 3:16). For this reason, the Bible should be divided into the following four categories to better derive context and meaning:

1. Historical record of factual events.
2. Parables with allegorical meaning.
3. Prophetic text containing apocalyptic imagery and symbolic language.
4. Doctrinal and theological teachings.

As demonstrated above, the first of the four categories require us to take the many biblical stories and narratives at face value because they comprise historical record. However, the second and third categories containing parables and prophetic text are different. They all contain a good deal of symbolic language and apocalyptic imagery and therefore must not be immediately treated literally. While the fourth and final category pertaining to doctrinal and theological teachings, like the rest, is subject to its own special rules of interpretation. Analyzed accordingly, the Bible makes perfect sense. Otherwise, it will confuse us to no end. It's really that simple.

Special note: It is also important to realize that all four of the previously mentioned categories contain words that are translated from the Hebrew and Greek originals and must therefore be understood in light of ancient biblical culture.

TOPIC SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

- 1. The concept of hell described in the New Testament is also found in the Old Testament cloaked in apocalyptic imagery and symbolic language.**
- 2. The word hell is nowhere found in the Old Testament.**
- 3. Jesus taught that God would destroy both soul and body in hell.**
- 4. Gehenna, the word translated as hell, is analogous for the valley of Hinnom and used as a comparative degree for the state of hell.**

- 5. Historically, the Church has allowed for multiple views on hell and was never exclusively loyal to the view of Eternal Torment.**
- 6. According to the Bible, only God is immortal, not man.**
- 7. “Immortal worms” and “unquenchable fire” are graphic images representing complete destruction.**
- 8. Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire.**
- 9. The Greek *aion* and the Hebrew *olam*, often translated as “eternal”, “forever”, “forever and ever”, and “everlasting”, contain both temporal and eternal forms. They are also translated to mean “world”, “age”, “eon”, or “era”. They do not exclusively pertain to eternity.**
- 10. God’s justice is equitable, eternal torment is not. Annihilation teaches the perfect measure of justice while not excluding conscious torment.**
- 11. Eternal Torment is a slam on God’s just character.**
- 12. Hell’s consequences are eternal and irreversible—you remain dead forever!**
- 13. The Bible proves again and again that the wicked are consumed by fire and their souls extinguished. How then can they be left alive to burn forever?**
- 14. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus pertain to sheol, the transitory abode of the dead, and do not describe the final condition of man after Judgment Day.**
- 15. Revelation 14:10-11 is synergistic with Isaiah 34:10 and cannot be taken literally.**
- 16. There are no second chances after death!**

**17. The Bible does not always necessitate a literal or face value reading.
Context must be taken into consideration.**

In Christ alone,
John A.